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Matter of Fact . . . By Joseph and Stewart Alsop

Operation Spill-the-Beans

① THE END is not yet, in the tragic case of Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer. Now that Washington officialdom has digested the massive transcript released by the Atomic Energy Commission, there is grave and widespread worry about the many breaches of security that the transcript contains.

② Among those reliably reported to be acutely disturbed is the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission's own General Advisory Committee, the brilliant Dr. I. I. Rabi. In the Pentagon, too, and especially in the Air Force (which is most intimately affected) the release of the Oppenheimer transcript is regarded as the most wholesale disclosure of secret matter in a very long time.

③ It is true, of course, that the transcript was edited for security as it accumulated during the hearings. Yet the editing was obviously hasty, and in some cases actually contradictory.

④ Moreover the security officers plainly expected that the document they were editing would have only the most limited circulation. Hence they used a ridiculously transparent system of substituting rows of dots for questionable words and phrases. This system produces a series of puzzles about as hard to unravel as "Mary had a . . . lamb." As a result, the release of the transcript has done the following things:

⑤ • Revealed the existence of the hitherto top secret Air Force project, AFOAT I, for long-range detection of Soviet atomic and thermonuclear explosions. This pinpoints the operational setup of our long-range detection system.

⑥ • Revealed that our scientific analysts have found

the air sample the most reliable of the several available methods of long-range detection, and disclosed that our analysts know the precise character of the Soviet bombs listed thus far.

⑦ • Revealed a multitude of never published facts allowing detailed reconstruction of the basic recommendations of the Vista report, also hitherto top secret, including Vista's controversial Chapter Five. And this is especially interesting. For Chapter Five of the Vista report led the then General Eisenhower to make important modifications in his strategy of West European defense, and these modifications still guide the thinking at SHAPE.

⑧ • Revealed many vital details, also hitherto secret, about the famous Lincoln study of continental air defense, together with some supplementary data on Lincoln's predecessor, Project Charles.

⑨ • Revealed the exact timing of the vital discovery by Dr. Edwin Teller, which revolutionized the whole hydrogen bomb project. This lets the Soviet intelligence pinpoint the moment when our H-bomb project really got going, and so gives Soviet analysis the perfect base on which to calculate our H-bomb stockpile.

⑩ • Revealed certain other data that the Soviet intelligence officers can quite probably put together with their own air samples, and so infer the exact nature of this discovery of Dr. Teller's, which is the main theme of our H-bomb technology. By any standard, these are massive revelations. What is much worse, however, is what the intelligence analysts call the "totality" of the picture that the Oppenheimer transcript paints. In this document, for the first time, you find the exact course of the most

secret arguments, the precise climate of the highest official opinion, all the complex shadings of viewpoint and approach, as to several of America's most vital strategic problems.

This totality of disclosure really must be beyond pride for the Kremlin. For it permits the most difficult of all intelligence feats—an accurate assessment of enemy intention.

In the opinion of these reporters, security should never conceal from the Nation the basic facts of the national situation, yet there have been security investigations when facts were published that were well known to the enemy but not to Americans. And now the Oppenheimer transcript has told the enemy volumes he could never otherwise have learned with certainty.

And who, one asks, was responsible for this Operation-spill-the-beans? The answer is simple. The man principally responsible was the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Admiral Lewis Strauss, the passionate guardian of security, who fought and bled to prevent the country being told the truth about its situation by Operation Candor.

The history of Operation Spill-the-beans is long, complex and unappetizing. But the motive shines clearly through. The motive was to gain advance support for Admiral Strauss's finding against Dr. Oppenheimer, by making public such stuff as the William Liscum Borden poison pen letter, with its ugly charges that were unanimously repudiated by both the Gordon Gray board and the AEC itself. In these circumstances, it is interesting to recall that Dr. Oppenheimer was held perfectly guiltless of any disclosure of secret matter.

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